

Teach Us to Pray



SABBATH—JANUARY 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 105:5; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13; Psalm 44; Psalm 22; Psalm 13; Psalm 60:1–5.

When we pray the Psalms, our prayer lives will grow strong.

MEMORY VERSE: “One time [there was a time when] Jesus was praying in a place. When he finished, one of his followers said to him, ‘John taught his followers how to pray. Lord, please teach us how to pray, too’ ” (Luke 11:1, ICB).

MANY CHRISTIANS believe that they can't plan or write a real prayer. But remember that Jesus' followers asked Him to teach them how to pray. Jesus gave them a sample prayer. His teaching was a blessing to His followers. God put a prayer book, the book of Psalms, in the middle of the Bible for His people. The Book of Psalms shows us how God's people prayed in Old Testament times. The Book of Psalms also teaches us how we can pray today.

From early times, the Book of Psalms taught God's people how to pray (1 Chronicles 16:7, 9; Nehemiah 12:8). When Jesus prayed, He used verses from the Book of Psalms, too (Matthew 27:46). The Bible teaches us to do the same thing in our worship (Ephesians 5:19). This week, we will look at how the Book of Psalms helped God's people grow in their love for God and in their faith. Remember, the poems in the Book of Psalms are prayers. They teach us about God. These teachings can change the way we pray.

Make the poems in the Book of Psalms your own personal prayers. When we pray the Psalms, our prayer lives will grow strong. We will pray more often, too.

**HOW TO USE THE BOOK OF PSALMS IN PRAYER
(Psalm 105:5)**

What important part does the Book of Psalms have in the worship experience of Christians? Read Psalm 105:5; Colossians 3:16; and James 5:13 for the answer.

How can we use the Book of Psalms in daily life? Each day, read a poem from the Book of Psalms. Start with Psalm 1 and read a new poem each day until you reach the end of the book. Another way to read the Book of Psalms is to choose a topic that talks about the same experience you are having. You can choose from many different topics. As we saw last week, one topic is the lament. A lament is a poem about sad feelings. A lament is a cry to God for help. The Book of Psalms also includes thanksgiving poems, praise hymns, songs about confessing sins, and wisdom poems. In wisdom poems, the poets ask God for advice. History poems talk about Israel's past. There are also poems about anger. Another group of poems is journey songs. People sang journey songs on their way to Jerusalem to worship God.

So, how should we understand the poems in the Book of Psalms? First, read the poem. Then think about it carefully and pray. Notice the way the poet talks to God. What are the reasons for his prayer? How does your own experience match the poet's experience? How can the poem help you talk about your experience? You will be surprised at how often the poet understands what is happening in your own life.

What happens if you read something that makes you feel that you need to change your behavior or thinking? Ask yourself if the poem is showing you your false hopes. Or is the poem asking you to change something else in your life? Think about what the poem's message teaches you about Jesus and His work to save you. We will understand an idea better when we look at how it connects with the Cross and God's forgiveness.

As you read, ask God to write His Bible truth on your heart and mind. If the poem makes you think about someone you know, pray for him or her. When we do these things, the messages from the Book of Psalms will bless our lives.

“Let the teaching of Christ [Jesus] live inside you richly [the same as a rich treasure]” (Colossians 3:16, ERV). What word picture do you see in this verse? What does it mean? How do Jesus' teachings live inside us? How does reading the Bible help us have this experience?



Think about what the poem's message teaches you about Jesus and His work to save you.

TRUST IN TIMES OF TROUBLE (Psalm 44)

Have you felt that God was very far away? Have you wondered why God lets you suffer and allows bad things to happen? For sure, we all have felt this way. The poets who wrote the Book of Psalms felt this way, too, at times.

What does Psalm 44 say to us? Why is this message important to Christians in every age of history?



We learn that God doesn't expect us to behave as if our suffering and pain aren't real.

Have you noticed that there are some poems in the Book of Psalms that we don't use for worship in church? Why do you think that is so? Maybe we think there are some words in the Book of Psalms we shouldn't say during worship in church. Or maybe we think that some of the experiences in the Book of Psalms are too horrible and ugly to talk about during public prayer or even in our private worship.

Yes, we must carefully choose the words we say in prayer. At the same time, we must not hide our real fears and feelings inside our hearts. If we don't tell God how we feel, we will suffer pain. Worse, we won't learn to trust God. When we make the poems in the Book of Psalms our prayers, we learn to pray with no fear in our hearts. These poems give us the courage to say things we are afraid to say. We learn that God doesn't expect us to behave as if our suffering and pain aren't real.

Psalm 44 helps innocent Christians who are suffering. As the poet says: "We did not turn away from you. We did not stop following you. But you crushed [destroyed] us in this home of jackals [wild dogs]. You left us in this place as dark as death" (Psalm 44:18, 19, ERV). But look how the poem starts. The poet talks about how God did wonderful things for His people in the past. So, the poet trusts in God and not "in my bow" (Psalm 44:6, ERV).

Trouble comes to God's people anyway. The poet makes a list of all his troubles. His sad song is long and painful. Does the poet give up hope that God will save His people? No. The poet prays, "Because of your love, save us" (Psalm 44:26, ICB). As bad as Israel's troubles are, the poet knows that God hears His people and loves them.

Remember a time when God saved you in the past. How close to God did you feel in your heart? How can remembering that time help you when your troubles make you think God is far away?

A VERY SAD SONG (Psalm 22)

Yesterday we learned how our prayer life improves when we make the poems in the Book of Psalms our personal prayers. These poems also give us hope. They help us to know that God is very near to our hearts.

Read Psalm 22. What can we learn from this poem about trusting in God when we suffer?

The sad words in Psalm 22:1 may give suffering people the words they need to share their feelings of sorrow and loneliness. The poet cries, “My God, my God, why have you left me alone? You are too far away to save me. You are too far away to hear my moans” (Psalm 22:1, ICB).

These words are well-known to Christians. Jesus said these words while He hung on the cross. When Jesus said them, He showed us how important the Book of Psalms was to His experience as our Savior (read Matthew 27:46).

The poet also says words of hope in the same poem: “I will praise you when your people meet to worship you” (Psalm 22:22, ICB). Compare verse 22 with verse 1. Verse 1 is filled with suffering and pain. But verse 22 is filled with faith and praise. The words and feelings of hope in verse 22 don’t match the sad feelings and experience of suffering in verse 1. So, how can the poet praise God while he suffers so much? Because the poet trusts in God.

We can have this experience, too. When we pray the words of Psalm 22, we learn to look beyond our suffering. We look with the eyes of faith to the time when God will heal us with His mercy and make our lives new.

When we make the poems in the Book of Psalms our prayers, we will grow in spiritual strength and understanding. The Book of Psalms gives us words for our most painful feelings and experiences. Best of all, the Book of Psalms doesn’t leave us in our pain. Its poems help us to be free from pain, hurt, disappointment, anger, and sadness. The poems teach us to trust in God always.

We saw how Psalm 22 starts with sadness and ends with praise. Many poems in the Book of Psalms do the same thing. This experience from sadness to praise shows us the change that happens when we accept God’s mercy.

How can we learn to look beyond our troubles and trust in God?

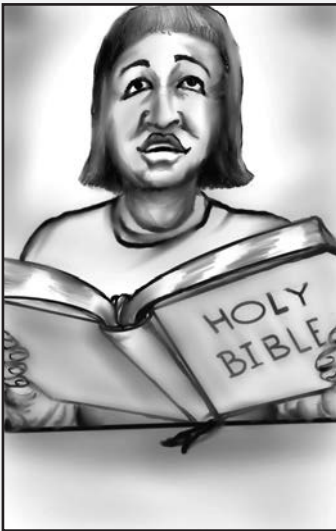


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FROM FEELING HOPELESS TO HOPE (Psalm 13)

We've all felt, at times, that God was far away. During hard times, we may think, Why is God allowing me to suffer? The poets who wrote the Book of Psalms often thought the same thing, too. Yes, our sins cause us to suffer. But sometimes our suffering isn't our fault and isn't fair. We've all felt this way, right?

Read Psalm 13. What two feelings does the poet talk about in this poem? What decision do you think the poet made that caused him to change his view of things?



When we trust in God to save us, our fear and worry (Psalm 13:1–4) will disappear.

“How long will you forget me, Lord? How long will you hide from me? Forever?” (Psalm 13:1, ICB). Again, who doesn't feel this way, at times? (Does God really forget us? Of course not! So, we shouldn't feel this way at all.)

Sometimes when we pray, we think only about ourselves and our problems. Praying only about our problems is a mistake. Psalm 13 shows us that we should remember God and His mercy to us when we pray. We should tell God that we believe He always keeps His promises. He never changes.

Of course, Psalm 13 starts with cries and complaints. But the poem doesn't end with complaints and tears. We must remember this important Bible truth.

Psalm 13 teaches us to trust in God's saving mercy and love (Psalm 13:5). When we trust in God to save us, our fear and worry (Psalm 13:1–4) will disappear. Then our hearts will change. Our cries will become songs of joy and praise. We will no longer feel hopeless.

If we want this change to happen, we must do more than only read the words of Psalm 13. We must believe them. When we pray Psalm 13, we must ask the Holy Spirit to help us to live in the way that this poem asks. The poems in the Book of Psalms are the Living Word of God, the Bible. God's Word changes our lives, our hearts, and our behavior. When we allow God's Word, the Bible, to change us, then we join with Jesus. As God's Son, Jesus showed God's perfect plan in every part of His life. Jesus made the poems in the Book of Psalms His prayers. We should, too.

How can your troubles bring you close to God in your heart? Also, why, if you aren't careful, can your troubles push you away from Him?

PLEASE COME BACK TO US (Psalm 60:1–5)

Read Psalm 60:1–5. Psalm 60 is a lament. We learned that laments were sad songs or poems. This lament is also a prayer. What do you think would be the best time to pray a lament? How can we get a blessing from reading the sad songs in the Book of Psalms during the times when our lives are filled with joy, and we feel happy?

The laments are a special group of songs or poems in the Book of Psalms. As we saw, these sad songs are also prayers. The laments talk about the experiences of people during hard times. These experiences may include sickness, sorrow, or spiritual suffering. Sometimes a lament may include all three experiences.

Should we read the laments in the Book of Psalms only when we are suffering? Of course not. The laments can bless us in many ways, during both happy and sad times in life.

The sad songs in the Book of Psalms teach us to love people who suffer. When we pray in public and thank God for His blessings, we must remember people who suffer. For sure, things may be going well for us right now. But what about the people all around us who suffer in terrible ways? When we make the sad songs in the Book of Psalms our prayers, we remember the ones who are in hard times. The Book of Psalms should fill us with love for people in pain and cause us to want to help them, just as Jesus did.

“This earth is the same as a big hospital filled with very sick people. Jesus came to heal the sick. Jesus also came to announce that He will save people from Satan. Jesus had health and strength. He gave His life to save the sick, the suffering, and people filled with demons. Jesus accepted everyone who came to Him for healing. Jesus knew that the people who asked Him for help had caused their own sickness. Jesus didn’t refuse to heal them. Love from Jesus entered these sick ones. They were convinced that they had sinned. Jesus healed the spirits and the bodies of many of these people. The Good News about Jesus is as powerful today as it was back then. So, we should expect to see the same miracles happen today.”
—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, pages 24, 25, adapted.

Do you know anyone right now who needs your prayers and God’s healing touch? Pray for this person right now. Ask Jesus to help you be a blessing to this person’s life.



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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Psalm 42:8, and Ellen G. White, “Poetry and Song,” pages 159–168, in *Education*. As Psalm 42 and the book *Education* show us, how are prayer and song connected?

In many poems, David wrote about how he was sorry for his sins. (A well-known example is Psalm 51.) Ellen G. White says that these poems are prayers that show real sadness for sin (read *Steps to Christ*, pages 24, 25). Ellen G. White encourages Christians to learn verses from the Book of Psalms to help them feel that God is close to them in their hearts and lives. Ellen G. White also talks about how Jesus sang verses from the Book of Psalms when Satan tried to get Him to sin or make Him feel afraid. Ellen G. White tells us: “Many times the words of holy songs fill our hearts with faith. These songs make us feel sorry for our sins. They give us hope, love, and joy! . . . For sure, many songs are prayers.”—*Education*, pages 162–168, adapted.

When we pray and sing the poems and songs in the Book of Psalms, the faith, courage, and hope of the poets become ours, too. The poets who wrote the Book of Psalms help encourage us to continue our spiritual journey, and not give up. The poets give us comfort. They help us know that we aren’t alone. Other people, the same as us, have suffered in dark times. With God’s mercy, they won the fight against evil. The Book of Psalms also shows us how Jesus works to save us. He lives always to pray for us (Hebrews 7:25).

The poems in the Book of Psalms are prayers and songs. Men wrote them. But the poems come from God. So, when we include the Book of Psalms in our worship, we learn God’s plan for us. His powerful mercy will heal us, too.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Remember, we learned that we can plan our prayers. Why is planning our prayers a good way to pray? How can the Book of Psalms improve our prayer life?
- ② How can the Book of Psalms improve our public or group-prayer experience? What are some ways your church can use the Book of Psalms in its worship?
- ③ What does the Book of Psalms teach us about faith and God’s healing mercy?

RADOSTIN'S CRY FOR HELP

Radostin hated his life. His friends were bad people. Worse, sometimes Radostin sold drugs to make money. He broke the law in other ways, too. But he wanted to change. He cried out, "I want to change how I live."

Radostin grew older and got married. He and his wife had two sons. Times were hard. Radostin left Bulgaria, his homeland, to look for work in another country. He found a job in Western Europe. In his new life, Radostin wanted to know Bible truth. Radostin wanted friends who could teach him about the Bible. He wondered, "How can people who know Bible truth find me?"

After some time, Radostin moved again to find a better job. Six weeks later, he was all alone in a small, rented room with no money or food. He was very, very hungry. That night, Radostin prayed for the first time in his life. He said, "God help me."

In the morning, someone knocked on Radostin's door. When Radostin opened the door, he saw a man in a suit standing there. The man held a Bible in his hand. Radostin understood that God sent the man in answer to his cry for help.

The man was named Paul. Paul brought food for Radostin. Then Paul invited Radostin to his church. Radostin went and was surprised. For the first time in his life, Radostin felt God's love in a church. God touched Radostin's heart. Radostin wept.

Radostin went home to Bulgaria. He told his family about meeting God at the church of his new friend, Paul. Radostin wanted to go back to the church. But he wasn't sure his wife would agree to move. Both Radostin and his wife had grown up in a worldwide religion that was different from Christianity.

Radostin prayed, "God, if it is Your plan, if You are God, help. If Paul's church is Your true church, send my family and me there. I want a total change in my life."

Later, Radostin's wife announced, "I don't want to live in Bulgaria. I want to live in the same city as Paul's church." Radostin knew his wife's words were an answer to prayer. God wanted Radostin and his family to move. Radostin knew that his wife wanted to know God, too. So, the family moved.

Today, Radostin is a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He goes to his friend Paul's church every Sabbath. Times are hard now for Radostin as they were in the past. But he has faith in God. Radostin says, "We don't pray for God to give us everything. We pray that He will protect us from evil. We ask God to help us and give us strength when times are hard."

Radostin knows that God hears his prayers. God heard his cry for help. Radostin says, "I wasn't a good person when I was young. Praise God, He really changed my heart!"

INSIDE *Story*

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